

IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (Currently amended) A communications apparatus connectable to a SS7 network for processing voice-to-data signals, comprising:

at least one pair of signal transfer points (STP), each of which is connectable to at least one other STP within the public switched telephone network (PSTN) wherein SS7 signals are transferred therebetween; and

a plurality of media gateways, each with its own point code; and

at least one ~~switching device~~ switch that aggregates signaling control connectable to the at least one ~~matched pair of STPs~~ which in turn is connectable to a one of the media gateway gateways ~~with its own point code~~, wherein the ~~switching device~~ switch controls the processing of the voice information received at the media gateway from the PSTN in response to the SS7 signals received through the at least one pair of STP's STPs.

2. (Currently amended) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein a first STP of the at least one pair of STP's STPs is located at a first geographic location and a second STP of the at least one pair of STP's STPs is located at a second geographic and a communications link is provided therebetween.

3. (Currently amended) The apparatus of claim 2 wherein a first ~~switching device~~ switch is in communication with the first STP at the first location and a second ~~switching device~~ switch is in communication ~~connection~~ with the second STP at the second location.

4. (Currently amended) The apparatus of claim 3 wherein the first and second ~~switching devices~~ switches each include a switching ~~routers~~ router which are connectable together over a packet transport network.

5. (Currently amended) The apparatus of claim 4 wherein the ~~first and second~~ switching routers are configured to transfer encapsulated SS7 messages (MTP, ISUP, and TCAP) between each of the ~~second~~ pair of STP's STPs.

6. (Currently amended) The apparatus of claim ~~1~~ 4 wherein ~~the at least one switching device~~ each of the first and second switches includes a plurality of call/media computers configured to process the SS7 signals received by the at least one pair of STP's STPs and to generate control signals which are transmittable over a data network to the media gateway which provides for the voice-to-data processing.

7. (Currently amended) The apparatus of claim 6 wherein the plurality of call/media computers are connectable to the at least one STP's pair of STPs and the router through a communications network which comprises a logical A-link.

8. (Currently amended) The apparatus of claim 7 wherein the communications network comprises at least one of: a local area network (LAN) and a wide area network (WAN).[[.]]

9. (Original) The apparatus of claim 6 wherein the plurality of call/media computers provide at least one of: class 4 and class 5 switching services.

10. (Currently amended) The apparatus of claim 6 wherein the at ~~lest~~ least one pair of STP's STPs is further configured to perform lower level SS7 protocol processing and encapsulate SS7 ISUP message for transfer over an IP network.

11. (Currently amended) A method for processing voice-to-data traffic in an SS7 signaling network comprising the steps of:

upon detection of a telephone call within the PSTN, routing SS7 information for the call through a switch that aggregates signaling control to a first pair of STP's STPs wherein the telephone call is routed over the voice trunk to a point code associated with the media gateway for providing voice-to-packet packet processing for transmission of voice information over a data network;

routing the SS7 information for the detected call to a first STP pair associated with the point code associated with the data gateway;

further routing the call signaling information to a second pair of STP's STPs associated with the point code for the media gateway over a plurality of B-links established between the first and second pair of STP's STPs; and

processing the SS7 information at the second pair of STP's STPs and providing to the processed information to at least one call/media gateway computers associated with the media gateway for further processing.

12. (Original) The method of claim 11 further comprising the step of generating call processing signals at the call/media gateway computers which in turn are transmitted over a data network to the media gateway.

13. (Currently amended) The method of claim 11 wherein a first STP of the pair of STP's STPs is located in a first geographic location and a second STP of the pair of STP's STPs is located at a second geographic location.

14. (Original) The method of claim 12 wherein a plurality of call/media computers are provided at the first and second locations and communications is established between the first

and second locations through use of a packet transport network.

15. (Currently amended) The method of claim 14 wherein the packet transport network is employed to transmit the SS7 signaling messages between first and second STP's STPs.

16. (Currently amended) The method of claim 11 wherein B-links are employed to transfer SS7 signaling messages between STP's STPs in the SS7 network and the at least one pair of STP's STPs.

17. (Currently amended) The method of claim 11 further including the step of performing lower level SS7 protocol processing and encapsulating SS7 ISUP messages at the at least one pair of STP's STPs.

18. (Original) The method of claim 11 wherein SS7 messages are both transmitted over both C-links established between the first and second STPs and over the packet transport network.